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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9093
INFO RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA 1824
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 2050
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 0403
RUEHTG/AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA 1992
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0588
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR 2938

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN OPPOSITION CITES CHAVEZ SUPPORT

¶1. On March 2, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) representatives published a private letter from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to the family of Rodrigo Asturias, who passed away June 15, 2005. The letter was published in the daily Prensa Libre as a paid advertisement. Asturias, also known as Comandante Gaspar Ilom, former head of the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), was the son of Guatemala's Nobel Laureate for Literature Miguel Angel Asturias.

¶2. URNG representatives Jorge and Guisella Rosal published the condolence letter, sent more than eight months ago following Asturias' death, as a memorial to the 24th anniversary of the founding of URNG, the tenth anniversary of the Peace Accords, and as a call to join a potential united leftist front. Although the letter briefly mentions Asturias' failed candidacy for the presidency in 2003, it does not cite any specific support for the URNG.

¶3. The condolence letter stressed Chavez's opinion on the significance of Asturias' life and the struggles experienced by Guatemala and the Latin American left. Chavez tried to establish a connection between the indigenous struggles of the 20th century and the leftist struggles of the 21st century.

¶4. Comment: The URNG are reaching for some kind of relevance to the current political situation in Guatemala. Even the suggestion of an endorsement by Chavez would be seen as a coup by URNG insiders and it would play well with a certain sector of the Guatemalan electorate. Although he did not say so in the letter, Chavez probably would choose the URNG's rhetoric over those of other Guatemalan parties. Rumors abound in Guatemala of Chavez's involvement with political issues, including financing political campaigns of like-minded candidates. If true, we question why the URNG needed to dig up an old letter on an unrelated topic to make their link to Chavez.

¶5. Sandino Asturias, son to Rodrigo, grandson to Miguel Angel, is thought to be attractive to the URNG as a presidential candidate, along with former Vice Presidential candidate Ramon Cadenas (currently an advisor to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner), and the dream candidate of Rigoberta Menchu. It is possible that the Rosales are using the letter to further the Asturias candidacy, as the URNG leadership is currently discussing the presidential chances of a number of candidates as well as the issue of presenting a candidate alone or together with another party.

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